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ABSTRACT

Despite its long history, accountability in education means different things to different people. There is little consensus about how to apply the concept intelligently and creatively in schools. This fastback explores various issues inherent in the concept and practice of accountability, as applied to public education. The issues include evaluation; whether accountability is to be used for improvement or control; teacher accountability for student learning; freedom, authority, and responsibility; freedom, equality, and accountability; education as a social system; the goals of education as they relate to accountability; professionalism and accountability; motivation and improvement; state laws and the laws of learning; accountability and levels of operation; and school choice and accountability. The brochure concludes with eight recommendations: (1) the goals of education should be clarified and then ratified, initiated by the legislature and completed by the people; (2) policies and programs should be evaluated in terms of how directly they contribute to the attainment of shared goals; (3) educators should develop programs and practices that help students achieve agreed-upon goals; (4) policymakers should provide the resources and adopt the policies that will enable educators to provide such programs and practices; (5) the state legislature should establish accountability mechanisms independent of policymakers and professional educators; (6) the accountability mechanisms should have authority to evaluate programs in terms of how well they attain the stipulated goals; (7) professional educational organizations should assume responsibility for helping their members improve; and (8) public schools and universities should create collaborative working relationships. (LMI)

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Accountability in Education: Still an Evolving Concept

Jack Frymier

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Accountability in Education: Still an Evolving Concept

by
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Introduction

Accountability in education is not a new idea. More than a hundred years ago the British Parliament approved a "Payment by Results" plan for schools in Victorian England; teachers were paid according to students' achievement. The law was eventually repealed because of negative reactions from all parties involved. About 25 years ago the term "accountability" began to show up in the education literature and as an agenda item on programs of organizations for policy makers and educators in the United States. Hundreds of references have appeared since the mid-1960s.

Despite this long history, "accountability" still means different things to different people, and there is little consensus about how to use the concept intelligently and creatively in schools. In spite of, or perhaps because of, varied and conflicting interpretations, "accountability" as an idea continues to attract attention and interest, both inside and outside the profession.

Some are attracted to the promises and possibilities inherent in the idea of accountability; others are reluctant to accept arbitrary definitions imposed on the term

(and then imposed on the schools). Because those concerned with accountability in education come to the discussion table from different backgrounds and with different motives, they imbue the term with different meanings; and so debate continues. And because accountability is an issue that subsumes other issues, it is difficult to sort out problems from possibilities.

The purpose of this fastback is to explore various issues inherent in the concept and practice of "accountability," as that term is applied to public education. Some of these issues are legal, some political, some practical, some psychological, some economic, some historical; still others are a function of common sense. All are "educational" in that they relate to schools and schooling in America today.

Let me put forward a working definition: To be accountable means to be answerable, to be responsible. To be responsible means to be legally or ethically accountable for the care of another; capable of making moral and rational decisions on one's own and therefore answerable for one's behavior; capable of being trusted or depended on; reliable; required to render account.

Responsibility, of course, can be assigned, assumed, or exercised. Therein lies the rub.

Issues Related to Accountability

The issues listed here are problems — by definition, an issue is a problem — complicating what “accountability in education” means in theory as well as in practice. This list of issues is not meant to be exhaustive, and the discussion of each issue is not definitive. The intent is to describe and illustrate.

Each issue is explicated briefly to highlight the complexities and nuances associated with “accountability” in the hope that such explication may prove useful to those who work with education policies. Although they are listed and discussed separately, all of the issues are inextricably intertwined; they are neither discrete nor unique, as the logical separation might imply.

My purpose is to further understanding as a precondition for intelligent action. Following are the issues:

1. Accountability Requires Evaluation

To be accountable means to be responsible. To assess responsibility, one must judge performance against a

criterion. To judge performance against a criterion means to evaluate. Therefore, accountability requires evaluation. Indeed, it cannot be accomplished without evaluation. Thus the questions develop: Whose performance? Whose criterion? Which criterion? Which evaluation procedures?

The recent history of accountability (perhaps the last 25 years) suggests that there are, as yet, no agreed-on criteria and no agreed-on procedures. That may change, of course, but the professional and general literature is replete with instances of accountability plans that were proposed, adopted, tried, and then discarded. Examples include performance contracting, teacher testing, merit pay, student achievement, financial disbursement, student dropouts, and educational "bankruptcy." Proposed modifications in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) currently are being touted as new possibilities in the area of accountability, and many states are in various stages of devising or revising their own accountability programs. The only notion that has been consistent over time is that accountability requires evaluation. The purposes of that kind of evaluation have never been clarified or ratified to the satisfaction of thoughtful persons, either inside or outside the profession.

2. Improvement or Control?

Evaluation can be used for improvement or control. In theory, evaluation should help people or improve programs. In the relationship between ends and means,

evaluation is a key to progress and improvement in any endeavor.

For example, quality control in business and industry is aimed at improving the quality of goods or services before those goods or services are made available to the public in order to minimize negative reaction by potential buyers. Post-production, having a place to register complaints following sales or service, encourages patrons to criticize products or services and allows management to monitor goods and services in ways that will lead to improvement.

Criticism and thoughtful review are essential to progress. Auditing, for example, is done to ensure integrity in the transactions of a business. Evaluation of construction by building inspectors aims to assure prospective buyers that the building is safe and to ensure that it has been constructed according to code. Concerns for improvement always involve evaluation of goods or services, whether it be inspection of meat at the slaughter house, regulation of banks, or monitoring of waste pollution. The purpose of such evaluations is to protect and reassure the general public, to ensure quality and to promote confidence in the system.

The theory is sound: Evaluative information that is valid, reliable, and current will make any operation better. However, in some instances the emphasis seems to be on control for its own sake. Many workers, whether in education or some other occupation, chafe at evaluation that is perceived as restricting those who are responsible for action. Electric companies react negatively to restrictions placed on their coal-fired generators, even

when evaluative data indicate that polluted air is harmful to the general health. Car manufacturers resist government requirements to put air bags in cars, even though research indicates that air bags save lives. Police review boards that cover up inappropriate behavior by police officers view criticism from outside as "unnecessary" when it conflicts with their own view of what happened from an "official" perspective. Evaluation sometimes implies that those who work to maintain an ongoing operation (such as a bank, school, or factory) cannot be trusted to do the job effectively unless they are "checked on" by another agency — an agency that is not in the same "chain of command."

"Don't trust the professionals" is the implicit message in many evaluation efforts. Sometimes such distrust is warranted. When those who are responsible for any operation have an opportunity to bend the rules and promote personal gain (for example, a bank officer who is in a position to defraud the bank, or a pharmaceutical company that misrepresents evaluative data to gain approval of its product with a resultant financial gain), then external evaluation is appropriate.

People may refuse to make needed changes because such changes will require more effort or a change of behavior. Or such changes may require them to report friends or associates who engage in inappropriate conduct, thereby making internal evaluation awkward and generally ineffective. "Whistle blowers" usually have difficulty, especially when their criticisms are relevant and valid. In circumstances such as these, external evaluation also seems to be appropriate.

In theory, evaluation leads to improvement. In practice, evaluation sometimes is seen as a mechanism for control. Control that improves quality is positive. Control that blunts enthusiasm, stifles initiative, or thwarts creativity is negative. And control that improves the quality of products or services but irritates and frustrates the people who produce the goods and services will evoke resistance or apathy or both. To argue that the end justifies the means guarantees that difficulties will arise. That seems to be the situation in education now.

3. Are Teachers Accountable for Students' Learning?

One of the statements frequently made about accountability goes something like this: "Teachers must be held accountable for students' learning." That is not the only way people talk about accountability in education, but this statement summarizes what many people mean when they refer to "accountability in education." But what does the statement imply?

For example, what does "learning" mean? Learning has always been defined in terms of behavioral change. "Students learn," we say, "when they think differently, feel differently, or act differently as a result of the experience that has been provided by the school."

If "learning" means "behavioral change," and if "teachers must be held accountable for students' learning," then teachers must be held accountable for what their students do — in the classroom, on achievement

tests, on the playground, and in the halls. It means that teachers are responsible for their students' behavior.

Two problems emerge from the notion that teachers are responsible for their students' behavior. One problem is legal and the other is psychological.

First, the legal problem. If teachers are responsible for their students' behavior (in other words, their students' learning), then, by definition, students are *not* responsible for what they do. Such a notion is antithetical to the whole history of Western civilization, at least since the Greeks: Individuals are responsible for their own behavior.

Even parents are not responsible for their children's behavior. If a child burns down a house or assaults another person, for example, the child is accountable, not the parent. If parents cannot control a child, that child may be removed from the home; but if a child does wrong, the child is punished by the state. In legal terms, the child is responsible for what he or she does, not the parent. Some communities (Los Angeles, for example) have recently adopted ordinances that hold parents responsible for their children's behavior in gang-related activities, but those laws have been vigorously contested in the courts.

To argue that teachers must be held accountable for students' learning is to argue that teachers are responsible for what their students do. Such an argument absolves students of responsibility for their own actions. That leads to the second problem, the psychological one.

Psychologists use the phrase "locus of control" to depict one aspect of learned behavior, and they describe

that behavior as "internalized" or "externalized." Nobody is born with an internalized locus of control; nobody is born with an externalized locus of control. Locus of control is always learned — at home, on the playground, in the school, and from interactions with peers and others.

Those who acquire an *internalized locus of control* evidence what might be described as a "can do" attitude. They feel "on top" of things. They are in charge of their own life. They believe that they can make a difference, that what they do counts, and that they can influence events or circumstances. Such people are self-motivated and "self-controlled."

Those who acquire an *externalized locus of control*, on the other hand, feel that they are not in charge of their own life and that what they do does not count. They think that they cannot make a difference and cannot influence events. They think other people or external forces are moving them hither and yon; they lack control over their own lives. "They made me do it. It wasn't my idea. It's their fault." Such persons are fatalistic, in the main. They have learned to vest control of their life in things and other people external to themselves.

If teachers accept the notion that they are accountable for their students' learning, then teachers will be forced by circumstances and logic to do things that foster development of an externalized locus of control on the part of their students, rather than an internalized locus of control. Teachers will insist that students do as they are told rather than think for themselves. Students will not be encouraged, or even allowed, to think. If they think, they may think thoughts that teachers do not want them

to think. Thus teachers will be driven to *control* students' behavior: what students think, what they say (in classroom discussions and on examinations), and what they do. Such teaching will lead to the development of dependence rather than independence, the exact opposite of what thoughtful educators and non-educators agree ought to be encouraged.

Policy makers in education sometimes argue that "teachers must be held accountable for students' learning." If one asks legislators or school board members, for example, "Do you think teachers should be held responsible for what their students do in school?" many will say "Yes." However, I suspect that if one pressed that notion further by asking, "Do you think policy makers should be responsible for their constituents' behavior?" every policy maker would immediately respond with an emphatic "No!"

"Well," one might continue, "what should policy makers be responsible for?" Most would immediately respond with "I am responsible *to* my constituents *for* my own behavior. I am responsible for what *I* do."

And that is right. Each person is accountable for his or her own behavior, but not for what other people do. Thus teachers must be held accountable for what they do as teachers, but not for what their students do. Teachers are responsible for teaching — for doing anything and everything they can to help their students learn. But teachers must not be held accountable for students' learning. Students must be held responsible for their learning.

Of course, such responsibility cannot be simply assigned to them by teachers. Teachers are responsible to

help students learn how to assume responsibility, how to find and use information, how to study, and how to develop interests, acquire skills, and achieve positive attitudes toward learning and life. But teachers must not assume responsibility for students' learning or for what their students do. Doing so would negate a fundamental purpose of schools and schooling.

4. Freedom, Authority, and Responsibility

If a school board says to a superintendent, "We are going to hold you responsible for thus and so," the superintendent will invariably respond: "Then I presume that I have the authority from you to get thus and so done." Authority and responsibility go hand in hand.

However, in practice authority means freedom to exercise options, to make decisions, to act. Those who exercise options must be held accountable for their actions, thus authority and freedom and responsibility are locked together in fundamental and irreducible ways.

5. Freedom, Equality, and Accountability

There are two ways to think about equality in relation to freedom and accountability. One involves varying definitions of equality that have developed over time. The other relates equality to freedom in terms of the interaction of the two basic dimensions of any social system.

Consider some of the different definitions that have evolved. Early in our nation's history, equality generally was interpreted to mean "equality before the law."

Later, "equality of opportunity" was set as a standard for providing all persons, regardless of race or gender, equal opportunities to achieve. Still later, equality was redefined to mean "equal allocation of resources" according to some pre-determined guide. Finally, "equal achievement" of outcomes (or equity) was set as a goal. All of these definitions are related to accountability in education; but because different people use different definitions at different times, communication is difficult and agreement impossible.

The problem is compounded because of the way political scientists use the concepts of equality and freedom in their descriptions of political systems. Freedom and equality are the basic dimensions of any social system, and they interact in ways particular to the culture. Every society uses these theoretical constructs in its interpretation of the kind of life it wants its people to live and the kind of government it establishes and maintains.

Typically, freedom is defined as the opportunity of an individual to exercise personal choice, to make decisions, to act on one's own. But freedom is a dimension; it has two ends. One end is characterized by choice or option, and the other end is characterized by non-choice or restriction of choice. In the same way, equality is a dimension. One end can be characterized as equivalency or sameness; the other as diversity or difference.

We can think of these two dimensions interacting in various ways. Theoretically, we can construct a social system in which choice is either minimized or maximized (the freedom dimension), and either sameness or diversity is emphasized (the equality dimension). Dif-

ferent cultures position the leverage point at different places on each continuum.

If choice is maximized and diversity is valued, that creates one kind of social system, one that is growth-oriented. If choice is minimized or eliminated and sameness is valued, that creates a different kind of social system, one that is control-oriented. If choice is maximized and sameness emphasized, apathy results. And if choice is minimized but diversity is valued, frustration results. These equations are represented in Figure 1.

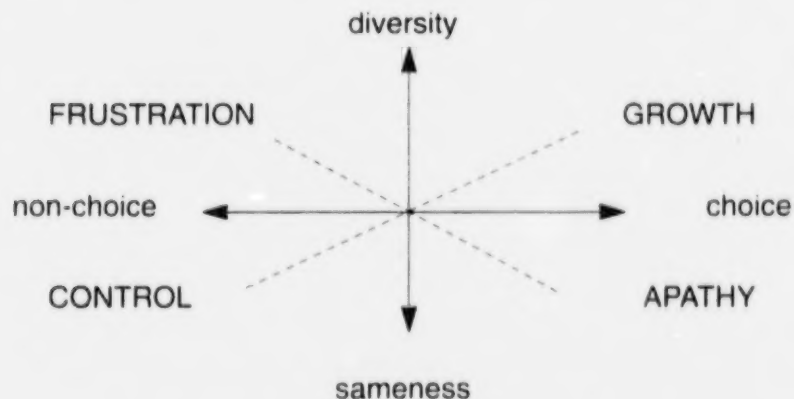


Figure 1. Freedom and Equality Dimensions

6. Education as a Social System

Consider a different point of view. The Bible says that "the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our king." God is presumed to perform all of these roles without difficulty.

When the Founding Fathers conceived the government of the United States and developed the Constitution as the authority base for that new government, they followed the differentiation described in the Bible, and they assigned these functions to different branches of government. They felt that consolidation of authority under one entity might make sense when that entity was an all-knowing God, but it did not make sense with fallible human beings; and so they separated the powers of lawgiver, judge, and king.

What we call "separation of powers" in government was a deliberate separation of authority according to function. Different people are expected (indeed, assigned) to perform the different functions. But consider the three functions in a generic way. The first and second are intellectual; the third is action-oriented.

Legislating is actually planning; it is conceptualizing or hypothesizing or thinking through before doing. Making laws or developing policies is predicated on the notion that "if we formulate the policy this way, then maybe such and such will happen." It is thinking that precedes action.

The judicial function is evaluative. Judicial activity involves reflection after action, the thoughtful, unhurried review of a particular policy or program that has been questioned. For example, is a policy appropriate and consistent with the basic goals stipulated in the Constitution? Was the implementation of policy consistent with the processes guaranteed as "rights" in the Constitution? Judges evaluate after planning has taken place or after plans have been implemented by execu-

tives, but the judicial function is intellectual in nature and evaluative in form.

By contrast, the executive function involves action. Executives take the laws or policies that have been developed and convert those "ideas" into things: organizational arrangements, programs, or practices. Executives translate hypotheses into reality, plans into action, ideas into products.

This system of government exudes integrity. Although people in the system make mistakes, most citizens have confidence in the system because of this separation of "powers" or functions. Thus the U.S. system of governance is complete in the systemic sense and aimed at truth in the functional sense.

This system is mirrored, for the most part, at the state level. Within the framework of many state governments, a state board of education constitutes the policy-making branch of the educational endeavor; the state department of education is the executive branch. But there is no separate entity — no state education accountability board — assigned the evaluative role. However, because evaluation is almost universally seen as important, separate evaluation units usually have been established within the state board of education or education department. Such a system is not theoretically consistent with our system of government.

Seeing a need for evaluation, education policy makers *assume* evaluative functions or executives *assume* evaluative functions. Boards of education evaluate policies they have adopted, or professional educators evaluate programs they have developed to implement those policies. Thus a hierarchy of authority is created in which

evaluators are responsible to (and thus beholden to) policy makers or executives. The system is not "clean." As a consequence, policy makers and executives pay attention to evaluative feedback if they want to and don't pay attention if they don't want to.

If policy makers or executives in education assume evaluative functions, such action represents consolidation of authority rather than separation of authority. Asked to pass judgment on their own policies, policy makers often conclude that they have done a good job. Or, if asked to evaluate the programs that they were responsible for developing and implementing, educators often conclude that what they are doing is both appropriate and effective. As the system has no independent judiciary, problems emerge.

Consequently, as a social system, education lacks the internal mechanisms to improve itself. The strengths of our system of government are rooted in the fact that benefits come with evaluation criticism. But education was not built that way. Education does not have a separate unit charged with the responsibility for evaluation, a unit that "stands alone" and is not beholden either to the policy makers or to the executive branch of the system.

Many educators, of course, oppose establishing an evaluation agency. "It would give such a group too much power," critics say. But the power of evaluation already exists in different, much less useful ways.

7. Goals of Education and Accountability

Four things seem important in thinking about the goals of education and accountability: 1) whether the

goals are general or specific, 2) whether the goals are measurable or directional, 3) whether the goals have been both clarified and ratified, and 4) what should be the benchmark against which to measure goals. Each of these points merits further discussion.

Many people argue that goals must be specific, while others maintain that goals can be stated in general terms. History suggests that specific goals get dropped by the wayside over time, whereas general statements of purpose are more enduring. In the Constitution, for example, the Preamble sets forth the goals of the United States: to form a more perfect union, insure domestic tranquillity, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare. Those general statements have never been modified, and they still provide direction and guidance to policy makers, executives, and judges.

Should goals be measurable or directional? Such a question presupposes philosophical agreement among all parties concerned. To date, we have had little agreement in education on how the question should be answered, but the issue must be resolved before adequate and appropriate accountability measures can be devised.

The goals of education set forth by President Bush and the nation's governors are inadequate because they are too limiting in terms of time (for example, to increase the graduation rate by the year 2000) and because they have not been submitted to the people for ratification. There is no general agreement that the goals are worthy of pursuit. Likewise, goals such as New Jersey's, which require the state to provide "a thorough and efficient" education, are too nebulous and learning-free to be helpful, either to policy makers or educators.

There has been much attention over the years to clarifying the goals in education, but clarification of a goal is only half of the equation. The other half relates to whether the goal is seen as acceptable by those involved. Is it attractive? Is it significant? Has it been "ratified" in the sense that people agree that the goal is important enough that it must be achieved? Clarification and ratification are both essential elements in thinking about education goals.

The Preamble to the Constitution sets forth the goals to be achieved by the nation. Those goals are general, not specific. But the fact that they have been both *clarified* and *ratified* gives power to the system.

Finally, what is the benchmark against which all activities or programs are measured to determine whether the education enterprise is effective? This relates to the "ratification" idea outlined above. It may be that what is needed in education is a constitutional convention of sorts, in which goals can be clarified and then submitted to the populace in a referendum and ratified. If ratified, such goals could serve as an agreed-on benchmark against which to measure educational efforts. Without a benchmark that has the general support of the total population, different parties (such as elected school board members, appointed superintendents, teachers, parents) can invoke first one criterion and then another, with the result that the system is disrupted. A benchmark must be specified and ratified by the people at large and not subject to change, even by elected representatives, except through traditional amendment procedures.

8. Professionalism and Accountability

Research by sociologists over the years has documented and described the reality of professionalism. According to this research, individuals and groups that are truly professional are characterized in six ways:

Professionals perform essential services. Professionals help other people. But the help they provide is neither a nicety nor a luxury; it is absolutely essential. The clients served by the professional cannot get along without the help. If a person has a heart attack, for example, that person must have assistance. He or she cannot deal with such a problem alone. Professionals help other people in the sense that they provide essential service to their fellow human beings.

Professionals have a unique methodology. Every truly professional person or professional group is characterized by the fact that practitioners have an elaborate methodology that they use when they provide the essential services to help other people. This methodology can be taught and it must be learned. No person is born knowing how to perform bypass surgery, do a root canal, draw up a contract, or prepare a warranty deed. Those who have a doctorate in physiology, for example, are not allowed to perform surgery; they have not acquired the specific techniques and methodological skills that surgeons have learned, even though they know a lot about human physiology. Nor do we allow mathematicians to build bridges, rockets, or roads; those func-

tions are reserved for engineers. Professionals learn certain methodological skills, and it is the responsibility of professional schools to help prospective professionals acquire those special methodologies, those professional tools.

Professional practice is based on research. Every truly professional person or professional group bases practice on research. Physicians generally do not belong to the Church of Christ Scientist, for example, because that church advocates a method of healing that is not empirically verifiable.

Professionals make judgments that affect the client. Professionals spend most of their time making judgments and decisions that affect other people, and seldom do those affected know whether the decisions are appropriate or sound. For example, if a physician diagnoses a patient as having diabetes and prescribes insulin therapy, the patient does not know whether the physician's diagnosis or treatment is correct or incorrect. The patient can check with another physician, but he or she still does not know. The same thing is true in other areas. If an attorney says that the title to a particular piece of property is clear, the client has to accept the attorney's word; the client does not know. Professionals regularly make decisions that affect those they serve, and those affected seldom know whether the decisions are right or wrong. In practical terms, this means that the opportunity for exploitation is inherent in any professional person's role.

Professional groups have a code of ethics. Because the opportunity for exploitation is inherent in every professional person's activities, those groups that are truly professional have developed and adopted a code of ethics to give direction and guidance to members of their group.

Professional groups use the code to discipline members. Those groups that are truly professional use the organization's statement of ethics and its governance structure as mechanisms to insist that every member of the group adhere to the ethical standards. Practitioners who do not abide by the code of ethics are drummed out of the corps. Truly professional organizations have elaborate procedures for evaluating the activities of members to assure the general public that the service provided is of the highest quality.

Using these six characteristics as criteria, we can ask ourselves these questions: Do educators provide an essential service? Is there a methodology that is unique and peculiar to education? Is there a solid research base on which to predicate practice? Do educators make decisions that affect other people, and is it true that those affected do not know whether those decisions are right or wrong? Is there a code of ethics? Do educators use the code as a basis for disciplining members of the group who deviate from what is judged to be appropriate behavior for professionals?

Professionalism might be an internal accountability mechanism in public education, but general evidence

suggests that the profession has not fully matured in terms of the six criteria outlined above. Obviously educators provide an essential service; obviously they make decisions that affect those they serve. It is certainly true that those who are affected do not know whether the decisions are good or bad. And there is research, but it is not used consistently. There also is a code of ethics, but few people have even read it. There is little evidence of self-discipline of members by the professional organizations; for example, nobody gets ejected from the professional organizations on the basis of evaluative data. Accreditation of schools by organizations such as the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools is an example of self-regulation by educators; but only institutions are affected, not individuals.

These observations are not criticisms. It took physicians more than 4,000 years to achieve truly professional status; educators still have a long way to go. Even so, the concept of professionalism might be thought of as an accountability notion. Over time it could be nurtured as a way to achieve better schools and better schooling.

9. Motivation and Improvement

Everybody assumes that schools and schooling can be improved. The question is: What will it take to get the involved people to improve? Said another way: What kinds of incentives will it take to motivate teachers and administrators to change?

Whether talking about students, teachers, principals, superintendents, board members, or legislators, one could

make the case that the general rule in education should be: "Do it right," because "If you don't do it right, then you have to do it over." An unwavering commitment to excellence is the only way to ensure quality experiences for students.

Concern with excellence ("doing it right") is the driving force behind the demand for accountability in schools. Competence can be required by the system, but excellence can be realized only if individuals within the system go above and beyond the minimum competence level. So the question remains: What will it take to get the people who make policies and the people who work in education to "do it right?"

Accepting the fact that everybody in the system will have to work harder and better if schools and schooling are to improve, the discussion here must focus on teachers. Much is known about what is required to help students work harder and better in schools (for example, superb quality curriculum materials, methods that ensure greater student involvement, feedback that fosters positive self-concept development, practices that enhance the development of an internalized locus of control). But what motivates teachers to improve their teaching is less well-understood. Consider a hypothetical illustration.

Suppose someone (teacher, principal, supervisor, superintendent, board member) comes forth with a new idea to improve education practice. The proposed change might involve new subject matter, a different way of organizing time and space within the school, a unique approach to instruction, or variations in the way stu-

dents are evaluated. The new idea would constitute, in effect, a hypothesis for change. Implicit in the suggested change would be a rationale something like this:

Here is a new idea. Other people have tried it, and they say it works. Researchers have studied it, and they say that children learn more, faster, and better. We have examined the proposal, and we think it would be an improvement over what we are now doing. Will you give it a try?

For teachers, the question becomes: "What does this proposed change mean for me?" What do those who hold out the prospect of improvement in schools promise teachers, who will have to take the new idea and make it work? An analysis of the situation suggests that something like this occurs:

Take this new idea and give it everything you've got. Learn the new teaching techniques. Use the new materials. If you work hard to make this innovation fly, we can promise you that your students will learn more and you'll feel good about it.

We promise teachers an increase in personal satisfaction if they do a better job and help their students learn more. Is that an adequate and appropriate incentive to encourage teachers to change? Is that sufficient motivation to foster educational improvement?

Some will respond: "Good teachers will accept that challenge. Good teachers want their students to do better; good teachers will give the innovation a try."

Even if that is the case for some teachers, what about the others? Is it realistic to depend only on "good" teachers to make significant improvements in schooling? By definition, teachers who are not "good" probably need to change what they do even more than teachers who are already "good." Thus the question remains: Is promising teachers that they will feel good and that their students will learn more if they adopt the proposed change an adequate and appropriate incentive to encourage them to change?

Look at the question from a negative point of view. If we reverse the logic, the rationale for change goes something like this:

If you don't take this new idea and give it everything you've got — if you won't work hard to make this change successful — then your students won't learn more and you'll feel bad about it.

If this analysis is correct, it suggests that the system promises teachers an increase in satisfaction if they try to improve and personal disappointment if they do not try.

Many current assumptions about how to motivate teachers to change are rooted in the concept of altruism. There is neither recognition nor reward for teachers who do better, nor is there disapproval or punishment for

those who do not improve. Complete failures are gotten rid of, generally; but mediocre and uninspired teaching is condoned. There are few extrinsic motivational factors to encourage teachers to change, no incentives to do better, no negative consequences for doing poorly. In fact, there are no external incentives or disincentives in the system at all. The system presumes that every teacher is driven by intrinsic, altruistic goals; that every teacher aspires to do better; and that every teacher loves teaching and children and wants to do an ever-better job, day after day. Those are wonderful notions, but they do not correspond to the reality of human ambitions.

A commitment to public service and altruism are powerful and noble ideals, but they are unrealistic constructs on which to build continuous improvement and better schools. The idea that those who are most effective in what they do will be recognized and rewarded is a central notion in the American culture. Even preachers who do a better job get a bigger church and make more money — and altruism supposedly is their stock in trade.

Negotiated agreements between teachers and school boards during the past 25 years have produced conditions of work predicated on assembly-line mentality: Everybody gets the same amount of everything as everybody else — resources, time, space, recognition, salary, and the like.

The single-salary schedule epitomizes the idea of sameness for everyone that characterizes the assembly line. Without being fully conscious of what was happening, teachers' organizations historically have opted

for contracts that guarantee members of the teaching group will *not* have incentives to improve.

When the single-salary schedule was set forth 50 or so years ago, the idea of such a uniform schedule made a lot of sense. At that time, men were paid more than women, whites were paid more than blacks, and married men with children were paid more than single men. Now, conditions have changed. Furthermore, the historical evidence is clear: Those who advocate raising all teachers' salaries as a basic condition for improving teaching (and thereby students' learning) have had more than 50 years of experience from which to conclude that society will *not* pay all teachers a high salary, no matter how logical such an argument might be. And pressure from the general public for a differentiated salary schedule has been unrelenting in recent years, despite teachers' reluctance to embrace such an idea.

10. State Laws and the Laws of Learning

There are two kinds of laws, those made by people and natural laws. The "laws of the State of Nebraska" represent the first type. The "laws of gravity" represent the second type. People are expected to abide by state laws; they *must* abide by natural laws.

Consider an illustration: People who learn to fly are confronted by the rules and regulations of the Federal Aviation Agency and by the law of gravity. They may choose to abide by the FAA regulations or not, and they may get by unnoticed, be caught and fined, or lose their license. But they must adhere to the laws of gravity in

order to fly without mishap; fliers ignore gravity on pain of death.

In education there also are laws made by people and natural laws: statutes by legislatures and laws of learning. Those who prepare statutes that affect education sometimes develop laws that are at odds with the laws of learning. When that happens, there may be no immediate or visible "crash." But there will be a consequence. For example, some legislatures have adopted laws over the years that were designed to "build floors" under educational endeavors, only to find that the floors became ceilings in the minds of those who tried to abide by the laws. In other words, the laws lowered expectations and thereby achievement, even though the intention was to raise expectations and achievement.

The point is that people-made laws and natural laws must match and mesh. Good intentions are not enough. School policies must be in harmony with the laws of learning.

11. Accountability and Levels of Operation

Schools and schooling in America were established and are maintained in hierarchical terms: federal level, state level, district level, building level, classroom level. One can make even further distinctions within each of these levels. The point is that levels are a part of the education reality.

Sometimes one level in education makes accountability demands on units that are two or more levels beneath it. If a building principal makes specific accountability

demands on students, for example, what happens to the teachers who were "left out," so to speak? What happens if a superintendent of schools makes specific demands on teachers in a district and ignores the principals of buildings in which those teachers work? Does being bypassed affect the thoughts and actions of people at other levels?

If state legislatures develop accountability policies that affect the schools at the building level, and if those policies are imposed and enforced by state departments of education, in practical terms that means that local boards and superintendents are bypassed. The question then becomes: What responsibilities do districts have to see that individual buildings fulfill state responsibilities? At the least, some district-level administrators feel left out, and they may feel that there is little incentive or logical reason to be concerned about fulfilling the imposed decisions. Or district personnel may actively work to circumvent the intentions of state officials. Skipping levels of authority may seem reasonable from one point of view, but often it results in havoc.

12. Choice and Accountability

Many people are dissatisfied with the quality of schooling in America. Evidence suggests that most children receive a good education, but some do not. However, there is a general perception that education in America is not as effective or "good" as it ought to be, even though "ought to" is almost never defined in ways that help educators or others improve schools. America

is driven by its ideals, and its failure to provide superb education for every youngster is interpreted by many to mean that schools and schooling in this country must be improved. "Choice" is an idea set forth in response to the perceived dissatisfaction of some people with the schools.

The United States was founded on the idea of being able to exercise personal choice. Restraint, denial of options, coercion, and compulsion are seen as un-American. Americans have always defined "democracy" as the opportunity of individuals to exercise personal options without restrictions by government. As a result, Americans have almost unlimited access to all kinds of things: information, entertainment, travel, and alcohol, drugs, and guns.

Coupled with the historical emphasis on the importance of "freedom of choice," as the phrase is often used, is the theoretical and ideological concomitant of "competition" in economic terms. Many people point to competition as the driving force in America's economic system. It would probably be more accurate to say that competition results from the fact that people are free to choose which products or services they want to buy, thereby encouraging those who provide goods and services to compete for the opportunity to make a sale.

Theoretically, those who provide goods and services in a competitive environment have different ways in which they can "close a deal." Some emphasize quality, others emphasize low price, and others emphasize style or form. Those who choose a product or service generally accept the fact that they get what they pay for.

If they pay for quality, they may or may not get style. If they pay for style, they may or may not get low price or premium quality. If they want all three, they have to pay for all three. Because America is a large nation with diverse people, different enterprises thrive because they offer different things to different people.

Within this historical framework of freedom and the ideological commitment to free enterprise, the idea of "choice in education" has emerged. But "choice" is not a new idea; it is the "voucher system" with a new name. First proposed by the economist, Milton Friedman, the voucher idea was set forth in opposition to Marx's statement in "The Communist Manifesto" that one of the characteristics of a communistic society would be "free education for all children in public schools." The fact that Marx supported the idea of public education was enough for Friedman to reject it, despite the fact that "free education for all children in public schools" existed in the United States long before 1847, when "The Communist Manifesto" was written. America's concern with anti-communism in mid-century led many to accept the voucher system idea without careful thought.

The argument for the use of vouchers is based on the notion that schools are part of the economic system of the nation. The school is like a factory, Friedman argues, and the child is a product of the school. If we want to produce a better product, then we must create an institution harnessed to the forces of free enterprise, namely "choice."

But the school is not a factory, and the child is not a product. The child is no more a product of the school than

the patient is a product of the hospital or the prisoner is a product of the prison. Those who accept the analogy of the school as factory and the child as product do a dis-service both to the student and to the profession.

If the school is not a factory, is it reasonable to say that the school is a service industry? The answer must be "no." Industry, by definition, means "the commercial production and sale of goods and services," and schools have never been commercial in that sense. No one would argue that the state of Indiana or the United States government are "service industries," in the sense that United Airlines or McDonald's restaurants are service industries.

Schools do provide services. They provide care for the child. They help students learn. Obviously the child is affected by what happens in the school, but the child is not a product of the school. Nor is the school an economic institution in the sense that a bank or a factory or a grocery store is an economic institution. The school is not expected to show a profit, for example, as are commercial enterprises.

But if other agencies are allowed to compete with schools, some argue, the public schools will have to do better or go out of business. Thus, by competition, education will improve. Allowing parents choice in education will be the engine that drives school improvement and reform.

The assumption in that argument is that schools as institutions and those who work in schools will be motivated by profit considerations. Ironically, the idea is appropriate for individual professionals, but not for

schools as institutions. Individuals who work in education can be motivated by the idea of profit and gain, but schools are now, and always have been, nonprofit institutions. It takes money to operate schools, of course; but the basic commitment at the institutional level has always been service, not profit. Even the great universities of America are nonprofit institutions.

What would it mean if the basic mission of such institutions as Harvard University, the University of Chicago, or the University of Minnesota were redefined in profit-making terms? What would it mean for the purpose of a university to be changed from "pursuit of truth" to "pursuit of the dollar"? Or, what would it mean if the boards of education of the Toledo Public Schools or the Chicago Public Schools, for example, were expected to show a profit every year? Is that what taxpayers want?

School boards and administrators could do many things to reduce expenditures: increase class size, reduce teachers' salaries, or curtail expenditures for instructional materials. By under-spending, any excess funds (in other words, savings) could be treated as profits. Boards of education could take these "profits" and invest them. There are many ways that schools could get money and spend money differently, if their basic purpose were redefined so they would be expected to be profit-making institutions. Not wasting funds is one thing, but showing a profit is a very different thing.

Some proposals to implement choice in education would make public funds available to private schools. Neither the federal nor any state government will likely provide public funds to private institutions without

controls, and so the strengths and advantages that private schools currently possess would be lost. They will become public or quasi-public, rather than private institutions. And they will not be free to reject or eject clientele or impose the kinds of demands that they are now free to impose on students without being subjected to the legal constraints now imposed on public schools.

Furthermore, the issue of "separation of church and state" will not simply go away. If public funds are made available to private (parochial or independent) schools, and if policies supporting such allocations are upheld by the courts, the understandable frustrations of people with public schools of today will meld with the natural inclinations of like for like, thereby splintering and crystallizing groups and subgroups along social, religious, economic, and racial lines. America will be Balkanized even more than it has been in recent years, and the process will freeze distinctions among groups by guaranteeing compartmentalization and separation with economic incentives on a massive scale.

But the issue is much larger than the schools. Public money for parochial schools will change America in ways that are both unanticipated and undesirable. History makes it clear that when government and religion join hands, either the government becomes strong and the church becomes weak, or vice versa. There is not a nation in the world in which the union of church and state has resulted in strong, effective government and strong, effective churches. Look at Iran: strong church, weak government. Look at England: strong government, weak church.

The only nations in which both government and church are strong are nations in which the wall of separation between the two institutions has not been breached. The book, *God Is Dead*, for example, was written by an Englishman. Such a proposition is almost unthinkable in the United States. But in England, with the government's long involvement — first with the Catholic Church and then with the Church of England — the church is a place where sightseers go, but from which local residents stay away in droves. Almost nobody goes to church in England. Churches there are local curiosities and historical artifacts, but seldom places of worship for more than a handful of local citizens. God is not dead. The church is dead. And the church is dead because religious leaders in days gone by sought to curry favor and join hands with those in political authority.

If we want to create such a system, under the law, then we ought to take those steps and adopt those policies with our eyes wide open and after extensive, probing debate. To adopt proposals that almost certainly will spell the dissolution of the public school, we must think and talk about such eventualities intensively, intelligently, and creatively. We dare not opt for "choice" because the word sounds good.

America might slip "sideways" into a dual system of schools under the rationale of saving money and improving education only to discover later, much later, that we lost both the idealism and the idea of the *common* school. In a nation that prides itself on prohibiting researchers from experimenting on participants without their full knowledge and informed consent, we must

have complete disclosure when it comes to experimenting in this way with our public schools.

The concept of "choice" in its broadest sense is undeniably important. For example, helping children learn how to make intelligent choices may be the most important thing that schools can do for children. Do schools now help youngsters learn to choose wisely and well? Is allowing students and parents to choose their teachers unrealistic? Is expanding choice in terms of what is studied, how it is studied, or when it is studied possible without creating chaos and disruption in the school? Can schools teach children to make intelligent choices by denying them the opportunity to choose in school? These questions are worth exploring.

Compulsory education, compulsory attendance laws, compulsory course requirements, compulsory assignment to particular buildings or particular teachers — all are grating practices in public schools. Expanding options between schools and within schools are important ideas and ought to be instituted in more ways than we traditionally have done in public schools. But the wholesale embrace of school choice and vouchers should not be lightly undertaken.

Implications and Recommendations

Accountability means different things to different people, and those differences make communicating awkward and reaching agreement difficult. The relationships of freedom, authority, equality, responsibility, accountability, policymaking and implementation, and evaluation are complex. But those relationships must be explicated and comprehended if the possibility of improving schools through accountability is to be realized.

Accountability is an important idea in education. It can be a vehicle for self-renewal and improvement. But in most of its present forms, it is an instrument of control. New concepts of who is accountable to whom and for what are required. Restricting accountability practices to fiscal considerations or achievement testing is too limiting. Requiring one person or group to be accountable for another person's or group's actions is too demanding.

All children can learn. Schools exist to help people learn; and schools are a vital component of a democra-

tic society designed to help people, especially young people, achieve goals that society stipulates should be achieved. But children are different from one another — indeed, each child is unique — and some differences make a difference in learning: age, ability, genetic make-up, home background, experience, interests, and needs. Public schools are responsible for helping every student learn, regardless of these differences. The diversity evident in any classroom requires education policies and practices that acknowledge the reality of individual differences and encourage and enable educators to respond to those differences effectively. Accountability policies and practices in education must include consideration of the differences that exist among students in schools.

Accountability requires evaluation. Evaluation can be used for improvement or control. Evaluation that fosters improvement is better than evaluation for control. Educators embrace the concepts and ideals of accountability that are improvement-oriented, rather than control-oriented. If educators have an opportunity to work with policy makers and others to specify education goals and then work to gain general acceptance of those goals, they will be enthusiastic about being evaluated.

Education lacks a “built in” component to evaluate the education enterprise. This void creates problems for policy makers and professionals in the schools, but “adding on” such a component without restructuring the total system probably would create more problems than it would solve. Policy makers are accountable to their constituents for clarifying goals, for enabling society to ratify those goals, and for relating the policies they

adopt to the goals ratified in a reasonable, appropriate, and effective manner.

Similarly, parents are accountable to society for adequately preparing their children for school and for supporting the school's efforts to help their children learn. And administrators are accountable to policy makers for administering the policies that have been adopted, and to teachers for assisting them in becoming better teachers. Teachers are accountable to other teachers and to administrators for teaching — to help students achieve goals that society has agreed are important to be achieved — and to improve their teaching. They must acknowledge and respond appropriately and effectively to the individual diversity present in their classrooms; and they must provide safe, secure, and stimulating environments, appropriate and evocative curriculum materials, interesting and meaningful instructional procedures, and appropriate and helpful evaluation devices. Finally, students are accountable to their parents and teachers for their own learning — in other words, for achieving the goals that policy makers have clarified and society has ratified. Accountability cannot be assigned by teachers. Responsibility must be assumed and exercised by students.

Two other issues bear mention: choice and national testing. Choice as an accountability concept is designed to encourage improvement in schools, and choice is important; but many of the current proposals for "choice" may change the fundamental nature of American society in undesirable ways.

Efforts probably will continue to implement a national testing program. Evaluating the complex processes

and results in education is difficult. Valid and reliable instruments and procedures must be developed further than they have been developed thus far.

Bearing these issues in mind, I would put forward the following eight recommendations:

1. The goals of education should be clarified and then ratified. This process should be initiated by the legislature and completed by the people.
2. Policies, programs, and practices in schools should be evaluated in terms of the degree to which they contribute directly to the attainment of agreed-on (ratified) goals.
3. Educators should develop programs and practices to help students achieve the goals that have been clarified and ratified.
4. Policy makers should provide the resources and adopt the policies that will enable educators to provide programs and practices to help young people learn.
5. The legislature should establish accountability mechanisms, independent of both policy makers and professional educators, to determine the extent to which the goals of education have been achieved.
6. The accountability mechanisms established by the state should have authority to evaluate education policies, programs, and practices in terms of the extent to which the stipulated goals have been realized.

7. Professional organizations in education should assume responsibility for helping their members improve. If improvement efforts are unsuccessful, those organizations should recommend that ineffective people be removed from practice.
8. Public schools and universities should create collaborative working relationships that foster research and development activities that will improve both public schools and universities.

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The Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation was established on 13 October 1966 with the signing, by Dr. George H. Reavis, of the irrevocable trust agreement creating the Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation Trust.

George H. Reavis (1883-1970) entered the education profession after graduating from Warrensburg Missouri State Teachers College in 1906 and the University of Missouri in 1911. He went on to earn an M.A. and a Ph.D. at Columbia University. Dr. Reavis served as assistant superintendent of schools in Maryland and dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and the School of Education at the University of Pittsburgh. In 1929 he was appointed director of instruction for the Ohio State Department of Education. But it was as assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction in the Cincinnati public schools (1939-48) that he rose to national prominence.

Dr. Reavis' dream for the Educational Foundation was to make it possible for seasoned educators to write and publish the wisdom they had acquired over a lifetime of professional activity. He wanted educators and the general public to "better understand (1) the nature of the educative process and (2) the relation of education to human welfare."

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